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## Work and Workers

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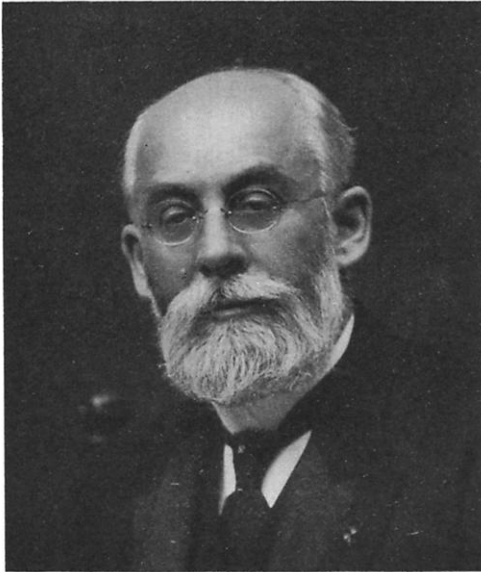
REV. ERASTUS BLAKESLEE, D.D., for twenty years one of the leaders in Sunday-school progress, died in Boston on July 12, at the age of seventy years. He leaves behind him an honorable record of able and faithful service—first, as a soldier in the Civil War, where he rose from the ranks to the position of brigadier-general; second, in the Congregational pastorate over churches in Massachusetts and Connecticut; third, as an editor and publisher of Sunday-school lessons, for the last two decades of his life. It is a notable thing in his career that he had reached the age of fifty years before he entered upon the particular work that engaged his complete interest and his supreme efforts—the Sunday-school work, by which he is best known, and for which he would wish to be remembered.

The limitations and defects of current Sunday-school instruction impressed themselves strongly upon him during his pastorate at Spencer, Mass., 1887-92. He realized that the young people of his church were getting only a limited and superficial knowledge of the Bible, while he wanted them to have a thorough acquaintance with it. Weekly Bible lessons of his own construction were introduced in the place of the international uniform lessons, and with great success. The new principles which he used were: (1) a connected study of biblical history; (2) a use of all the biblical material, instead of brief selections; (3) a division of the Bible into several great sections, with a systematic study of each; (4) the orderly arrangement of the Sunday-school lessons through a series of years, somewhat in the way of a curriculum; (5) the use of questions for written answers.

Dr. Blakeslee's chief aim was to get away from the desultory moralizing of the Sunday-school hour to a kind of Bible-study that would bear comparison with day-school work. At the time that he was preparing these courses of instruction at Spencer, President W. R. Harper (then Professor Harper at Yale University) was attracting attention in New England by his "Inductive Studies" in the history, literature, and teaching of the Bible. Dr. Blakeslee sought President's Harper advice and co-operation, but the removal of President Harper to Chicago in 1891, when he assumed the presidency of the University of Chicago, interrupted this alliance at an early stage. Dr. Blakeslee then secured the assistance of able biblical

scholars to oversee his work, and went forward bravely to prepare various series and grades of lesson helps on the new lines.

In 1892 his plans had so far advanced, and the success of his lessons was so promising, that he gave up his pastorate to devote his entire time to the Sunday-school work. He established publishing headquarters at Boston, and obtained the support of many prominent ministers, professors, and Sunday-school workers in an organization entitled the Bible Study Union. His indefatigable labors as lesson-writer, editor, publisher, and



THE LATE REV. ERASTUS BLAKESLEE, D.D.

promoter of Sunday-school progress brought him national renown and enabled him to be for twenty years one of the chief leaders in this branch of church activity.

The Blakeslee lessons were the pioneers of a new day in Sunday-school instruction. And they necessarily had much fighting to do. The field was in possession of the International Sunday-School Association, with its uniform lesson system. This type of instruction had during some twenty years established itself strongly. The great denominational publishing

houses had built up expensive plants for the production and distribution of these lessons. The Sunday-school world had come to believe that the uniform system was ideal. Dr. Blakeslee undertook to convince America that this opinion was mistaken, and that his lessons led the way to a better type of instruction. He had therefore both a pedagogical and a commercial war to wage. This did not daunt him. His military achievements in Virginia in 1863-64 had developed his capacities for a strenuous campaign. He pushed forward the Bible Study Union lessons with unwavering faith and tireless energy.

Each year brought larger success. The courses of lessons were frequently revised. More than once they were entirely remade. The

necessity of keeping his lessons within the capacity of the schools that wanted to use them, and the desire to build up a large constituency for these publications, delayed the full realization of his pedagogical principles. In the matter of gradation, his method was gradation of treatment of common biblical material for the whole school rather than a gradation of the biblical material itself. So that the Blakeslee lessons constituted a bridge from the uniform system of lessons to what we now know as graded lessons. But it was for a time necessary to construct and operate such a bridge. Now that the chasm has been crossed, and the graded curriculum has been accepted as the Sunday-school ideal, Dr. Blakeslee deserves recognition as one of the foremost prophets of this movement.

In the last five years he saw the new direction that Sunday-school instruction was taking, and joined heartily with those who were leading a further advance. The creation in 1903 of the Religious Education Association, with its aggressive purpose and high ideal of Sunday-school education, was not only welcomed by Dr. Blakeslee—he was in fact one of the persons that instigated its organization, through his personal acquaintance with President Harper, the founder of the Association. And he was until his death one of the ablest and most active workers of the Association in its Sunday-School Department. The rapid progress in Sunday-school ideals and methods achieved in the last five years in America opened the way for the further development of the Bible Study Union lessons, and it was his intention to remake them in accordance with the graded curriculum requirements. It was remarkable that he kept pace with the advance.

We are assured that the Blakeslee courses of Bible-study will be continued and improved as their author planned. Dr. Blakeslee's son, Robert Blakeslee, aided by the editorial staff associated with his father, will maintain their publication. There is no less need today than there was twenty years ago for a complete system of Sunday-school instruction on the lines of scientific education, and a glorious future awaits the first system that can bring an ideal curriculum into existence. It would be a fitting monument to Dr. Blakeslee's memory if the Bible Study Union lessons could render this service and achieve this distinction.